

Must Be Some Kind of Backyard Portal

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Summary: When the first thing fell from the sky, she panicked. By the third, she was just pissed. Then the helmet came through the split in the sky. Shortly afterwards, so did it's owner. Now he can't get back... And he needs to stop calling her "little wretch". Rated for possible adult themes and swearing. 30-ish years pre-Thor. Loki/OC-ish... Mostly Complete, just dusting for errors

1. Chapter 1

***** This one's been gathering dust in my folder o' plot bunnies forever, so I thought I'd dust it off and see if it works â€" clearly I own nothing of the Marvel universe, but the multitude of OCs are all mine! Hope you guys enjoy! *****

At first she thought a plane had crashed, or that maybe a sky-jumper had dropped something. Melanie watched the sky anxiously for a few minutes longer, holding the strange object in her hands as she did. She was greeted with clear blue and scorching heat. No more falling shoe-things; that much seemed certain.

Her gaze dropped from the sky and she scanned her backyard again. Nothing looked out of place, except, of course, for the dent in the middle of the green plastic patio table that the shoe-thing had left when it landed. Melanie pursed her lips and squinted back up at the sky for a moment longer. _Do I report this? Like, call 911 or something_? She thought skeptically. Her imagination leapt ahead, leading her down the inevitable path of having to tell a bored sounding operator in Santa Fe that she was mildly alarmed because a strange shoe had dropped from an empty sky onto her patio table.

"Not gonna happen," she muttered to herself, walking back towards her trailer. Her yard was not much more than the now-dented green plastic table, its two matching chairs, a flower pot with a bunch of windmills stuck in it and lots of rocks. And gravel. And more rocks.

No grass. She couldn't even imagine getting pretty green grass to grow permanently out here, the way it did up in town on the wealthier streets. She couldn't imagine wanting to waste the water, or the money. Or the effort, really - she assumed growing grass in this climate was a time-consuming affair, and if there was anything she enjoyed avoiding, it was time-consuming affairs.

She pulled her screen door open and listened to the hinges give out their familiar _scree_ of protest. _Mom would insist I fix that_, she thought ruefully. Other thoughts came on the heels of that mental image, and Melanie purposefully shoved them away, putting the shoe down onto the slightly sturdier dinette table inside her trailer. She pulled open the fridge, grabbed a beer, popped the cap, and then tossed herself down at the dinette. The bottle-neck of the beer was cold and slick and she relished the feeling in her hand's grip as she took a swig.

The shoe-thing caught her attention again, and she stared at it, wondering if this was some kind of elaborate plot for a practical joke, possibly by Eli, or Tala and Lulee across the way. _Nah, they're too lazy, besides, where would they even get a shoe like this_? She convinced herself easily enough, but the shoe still sat before her, obvious evidence that _someone_ had definitely left it for her.

If she had to describe the shoe, she'd say the closest thing that resembled it was a wedge sandal, with gossamer fabric that flowed out the sides, obviously there to wind about one's leg to hold the shoe in place. Elaborate gold-laced designs traversed gracefully all along the 'wedge' itself, and huge (probably fake) diamond-like jewels sat in the exact center of the strap that went across the toe area. The fabric there was the same unearthly soft material as the long flowing straps off the sides.

You can hardly call it a wedge, she thought critically, examining the layer after layer of nearly-holographic looking material that comprised the majority of the shoe. Cautiously, Melanie poked one finger into the side of the 'wedge' and jerked her hand back in surprise when the entire shoe appeared to flicker in a wave of gold and rose pattern. The waves settled after a moment and Melanie turned her hand over to look at her finger, suddenly concerned that the strange material may have done something to her skin.

She wanted to think it was some kind of crazy high-fashion shoe, but she really couldn't buy into that theory, she'd never seen fabrics or materials like this anywhere. The sparkling wave produced by her prodding finger was not coming from a power source of any kind, it almost looked like grains of sand, alive with color and movement, were part of the materials that built the shoe. Melanie shook her head and drained the last of her beer, before getting up and stepping across the tiny center tiled area of her trailer, to the sink. She immediately washed her hands, aware that she had no idea what the golden dancing sand the shoe seemed to be made of was, and also, it was a shoe. Shoes go on feet. Feet are gross.

She proceeded to finish up washing her breakfast dishes, which she had been in the middle of doing earlier when the resounding and alarming 'thump' of the shoe landing on her table outdoors had interrupted her. Had there been a slight fizzie to the air just before? She was pretty sure she got goosebumps, and a weird,

hair-lifting feeling on the back of her neck, right before the thump of the shoe.

"Idiot," she taunted herself under her breath, wondering if she was buying in to the crazy that seemed to affect a lot of her neighbors. Aliens, voices, spiritual beings and the like were always doing or saying something to someone around these parts, if you listened to her neighbors. Melanie herself had never felt anything except slightly embarrassed living in this area, certainly nothing extra-ordinary. _Does a shoe qualify as sci-fi?_ She wondered, turning around and leaning her hip against the counter top, regarding the shoe-thing once again with skepticism.

After a long moment, she grabbed the shoe and tossed it into the cupboard where she kept her own shoes, wanting it out of sight so that it could become out of mind, at least until she got her day in order. She didn't get a lot of full days off, since her shifts at Marge's were usually kind of long, so when she did, she had lots of shit to do. Grabbing up her little wicker laundry basket, Melanie stepped back out into the baking sun and walked to the other end of the trailer, to the little lean-to she had there, where the washing machine lived. A hanging shelf from the roof of the lean-to held her laundry soap and liquid fabric softener, and she made quick-work of throwing her load of clothes in.

She was just picking the basket up off the ground, to take back inside, when an itching shiver ran down her spine and she spun around just in time to see a shower of little metallic objects rain down from the sky, directly onto her plastic yard-table. Her eyes bounced back and forth from the surface of the table, where some of the metal bits were now buried into the plastic and back up to the little rift in the sky above the table. It looked like the sky had split it pants, about 15 feet off the ground; the dazzling, clear, and normal blue of the regular sky completely surrounded the strange, abruptly dark, split.

She was terrified to move, images of the metal bits burying themselves into her skull playing past her mind's eye, so she cringed against the washer, hearing and feeling it rumble on through the wash cycle against her backside. After 30 seconds, the split in the sky suddenly flattened to a thin line and then disappeared. Melanie gaped at the spot it had been in, feeling her eyes sting a little from lack of blinking. There was no evidence at all that it had ever existed, except for the litter of metal bits all over her back yard.

Slowly, warily, Melanie crept toward the table and bent to the ground, picking up one of the metal bits from the dry, dusty earth. She turned it over in her hands and realized that it was currency of some kind. Almost a coin, except with more heft to it, thicker, not a perfect circle. There was a number on it, 25, and she found that oddly reassuring. Seeing the number broke the temporary spell the split and the almost-coin had on her, and she moved quickly, picking up all the bits off the ground, dumping them into an empty coffee can she had sitting just under the door-steps to the trailer. She'd intended to use the coffee can as an ash-tray for when Lulee stumbled over after work, but figured this was more important.

The almost-coins pinged and clinked against one another as she dropped them in the can, and after she'd dug the ones imbedded in the table out with a butter knife, she was almost a little irritated. The

green plastic table was looking a little pock-marked and rough now; Melanie had been so pleased to find it at a garage sale a couple of years before, and had always thought that it, and its chairs, brought the much needed green her yard needed to truly be considered an alright yard. Now the poor table looked like someone had burnt it with cigarettes or gouged it with knives - signs of trashy-living that she would rather avoid.

Melanie snapped the coffee can's plastic lid back on top of it and stomped inside, stooping to tuck it into her shoe-cupboard with the shoe-thing. The weird sky-collection was growing and she wasn't pleased. However, she was still reluctant to report what had happened; living so close to Roswell had its drawbacks, the authorities didn't believe anything anyone said anymore, no matter how much proof you had... unless you were talking about regular, earthly things. Melanie leaned her hands on her small kitchen counter and tilted her head to look up at the sky through the kitchen window. The split was not earthly, she knew that in her gut.

She flinched when she heard her neighbor's old cuckoo clock began to hoot and holler next door, marking the time as 1 in the afternoon. Her day was wasting, and she was staring up at the sky too much. Taking a deep breath, Melanie turned her energy towards her tiny bathroom and set to cleaning it, top to bottom, knowing that there wasn't a damn thing she could do about the split anyway.

By 5 in the afternoon, Melanie was feeling better about life. Her clothes were hung on the drying line that stretched from the lean-to down to the back fence of her little yard, her bathroom and kitchen were scrubbed clean, the floors and surfaces were dusted, tidied, and wiped clean throughout the trailer, and she had just stripped her bed to wash her sheets and pillowcases.

Stuffing the armload of fabric into the machine, she reflected on the split, and wondered if she was making a big deal over nothing. She wasn't the brightest student in the science arena, and she had to wonder if perhaps somewhere in the world, there were scientists working on building whatever the split was. _Maybe you're witnessing a huge breakthrough_, she thought, _maybe this is history happening, and here you're pissed about the table._

Melanie trailed her fingers affectionately along the top of the table as she walked by it on her way indoors. It was a good table. Cheap, effective, sturdy - it held up to meals, parties, tools, Eli's giant feet when he used to kick back after work and even her own butt, whenever she sat on the table top. _Best 5 bucks I ever spent._

Back inside, she set the oven to preheat, and then pulled a generic TV dinner out of her tiny freezer. She'd picked it up the night before, with a second one: two-for-one special at Marge's. Pulling the tray from the box, she stabbed at the plastic with a fork and put the tray on a little baking sheet, before shoving the whole thing in the oven. Once the timer was set, Melanie popped another beer and tossed herself down on the couch side of the dinette, flicking the TV on as she did.

When the creeping, crawling, hair-lifting feeling came back a few minutes later, she went rigid. "No," her denial was spoken quietly, and then more loudly, "NO." Spilling her beer, Melanie clambered to her feet, slamming the bottle onto the dinette table and striding for

the trailer-door. She was too late, not that she could've done much any way. The table almost exploded with the impact of the box that came through the split this time. The table legs snapped and flew out from beneath the table top, which itself cracked into several pieces, shattering from the middle outwards.

The box that came through was as large as a bedside table, it appeared to be made of a solid, sturdy wood, and even it sustained some damage from the fall. Melanie stood open-mouthed and panting in the trailer doorway, staring at the ruin of her table and the mess in her backyard.

She heard her neighbour yelling at her from inside his trailer, drunkenly complaining about the noise, but she ignored it as she slowly stepped down from the trailer steps. Her gaze locked on the split in the sky, slightly less visible now since the sky itself was slowly moving towards dusk. She couldn't be certain, but she thought that she saw something in the split, a flicker of light and movement, and then the split flattened to a line and disappeared again.

She knelt at the edge of the ruined table, knowing that the gifts from the split were getting larger, and therefore more dangerous, but found herself helplessly fixated on her destroyed possession and the large box on top of it. What if the next thing is large enough to hit the trailer? She worried, reaching out and slowly gathering up table chunks, making a little pile in front of herself. Eventually, she climbed to her feet, grabbed a broom and used it to gather up all the bits of table, her vigorous sweeping bringing up puffs of dusty dirt with it. A few minutes later, and all the table bits were crammed into her large trash can, which she dragged back to the end of her tiny driveway.

The box was next, but she wasn't sure what to do with it, it was too big to bring inside the trailer; it would take all the available floor space. Instead, she grabbed her trusty butter knife again and began to dig at the box, around the damaged spots. Crouched next to the box, feeling an ache beginning to travel up her thighs from staying in the one position for so long, she let out a sigh of relief when the side of the box she'd been prying at finally cracked open.

The inside of the box was full of letters, dried flowers, and other random trinkets. The smell of perfume that came from the box, now that it was open, was rich and heady. "What the fuck?" She asked the empty air, lifting up a long lock of buttery blonde hair tied in a frilly, lace-edged pink ribbon, "Ew." She dropped the hair and grabbed a letter, feeling disappointed when she opened it and realized it must have been written in a far different language than her own "it was just a muck of gibberish; even the letters weren't a familiar alphabet.

Melanie let herself tip back slightly, so that she could sit on the dusty ground next to the box, and began to open the letters, one after another, the same strange language in each one, but, she noticed after the fifth or sixth letter, that they weren't all written in the same hand. She began grouping the letters according to the handwriting in them, and once she had sorted all the piles, she realized there were 14 different kinds of hand-writing that she could see.

She couldn't understand the language, but she knew what these letters were, nonetheless: love letters. Judging by the curling, swooping, elegant script, not to mention the hearts and flowers some of the writers had drawn into the margins of their letters, these were all written by women. Surrounded by the tidy piles of letters she had sorted, she was better able to see what else lay within the box. There were other tied off locks of hair besides the blonde one; red, mahogany, rich yellow, icy pale blondes, and black hair like her own, dark as the night.

It struck her as horribly old-fashioned, and really a little bit gross. She couldn't recall a time when she was ever so madly in love with someone that she wanted to give them some of her hair. _Stalker much?_ Melanie imagined the look on Eli's face if she'd given him a hank of her hair, tied with some creepy ribbon. _He would have laughed and then asked if something was wrong with me._ She smirked a little and then reached for some of the dried flowers, their texture feeling strange in her fingers, dusty and crinkling.

I've never seen flowers like this before, she thought to herself, in mild confusion. True, she didn't exactly live in a climate that encouraged an extensive flower garden, but these seemed like something straight out of a sci-fi flick. They were flowery enough for her to recognize that they were indeed flowers, it was just that, like the shoe-thing, they appeared to be so much _more_ than a regular flower should be "busier, more colourful, more petals and parts.

Well, I can't leave this shit out here, she thought to herself, climbing to her feet and pushing the dried flowers to the ground, _I need to hide this stuff._ She imagined Tala, or, god forbid, Lulee, coming over for a chat and seeing this cracked open box, covered in weird gold loops and swirls, filled with the obvious trophies of some man's (_or woman's) _many conquered hearts. _Oh my god she'd never leave. _Melanie pictured Lulee's eager, hungry expression and the ensuing onslaught of questions when the woman assumed this was all either by, or for, Melanie herself.

No, I need to hide it. She got on her hands and knees next to the trailer and reached underneath to the pile of flattened cardboard boxes wrapped in a tarp, which she kept there from when she'd moved in. It only took her a moment to fold a box together and she proceeded to load it up quickly, thankful for the falling darkness of night, to hide her actions from her neighbors on either side. The last items she put in the box were several small lockets, and she paused a moment in her flurry of evidence-hiding, to click open each locket and look at the images within.

She'd guessed right, every little painted miniature portrait within was of a different woman. Sighing, Melanie dumped the handful of lockets into the box and got to her feet, brushing the dusty dirt off her backside as she again peered up at the sky, which was now dark. "Please stop sending your trash," she murmured to the stars.

2. Chapter 2

***** Putting up the second chapter right quick, guys! Tell me what you think! *****

A few hours after the box's messy arrival and Melanie was laying completely stretched out in bed, half asleep, three empty beer bottles cluttering her small bedside shelf. The TV was droning on and on, but Melanie wasn't watching it anymore. In the dreamy, thoughtful stage between awake and sleeping, she was thinking about the split. She was distantly grateful that it hadn't given any other, larger, gifts from the sky, but mostly she was fixated on the flash she had seen within the split, the movement. _Was it a person? _After obsessing over the brief mental image for hours now, she felt pretty certain that the movement she'd spied was that of a person, a long ways off in the distance behind the split, turning and walking away.

_If someone's on the other side, that means they are throwing shit through the split on purpose. _And then another thought: _Can they see me?_ Melanie sat up, putting a hand to the wall to steady herself a little when all the blood rushed out of her head from the sudden movement. _Maybe I could get them to stop before they toss a frigging Buick through._ She disentangled her feet from the clean set of sheets she'd put on the bed, while her other set dried on the line outside, and turned in bed, dropping her feet to the floor. After a hot day, the trailer was still clinging on to the leftover warmth left within, despite the fact that it was much cooler outside, which was good, because she didn't really want to dig any pants out to put on top of her PJ shorts.

Two of her empty beer bottles sat on the little kitchen counter, top-down, drying out from where she left them after rinsing their insides clean. She'd intended to add them to her bottle-stash that sat beneath her trailer in a grimy plastic bin, destined to be brought to the depot for the return-it money. She snatched up one of the bottles on her way to the dinette, along with a pen and the pad of paper that she received from her realtor back when she'd moved in.

Grimly, she pushed her hair off her face and bent to the paper, pen gripped tightly, and began to write:

_Dear Person Who Keeps Tossing Things into my Backyard, _

Stop. Please stop throwing things into the split â€" you're destroying my yard and I don't want your garbage. I saved your box of letters, your shoe, and your coins â€" if you want them back then you'll have to figure out a way to get them, because I can't pass them back.

_Thanks for your cooperation. _

M. F.

She was fully aware that _if_ the letter made it through the split, and _if_ anyone actually found it, that they would in all likelihood not be able to read her language, since she couldn't even begin to understand theirs, but she hoped that they might at least realize there was a living person on the other end of the split, and stop tossing stuff through.

Melanie re-read her letter, nodded in satisfaction at the wording, and then rolled the page up, stuffing it inside the empty beer

bottle. She experimentally tipped the bottle upside down and found that the letter stayed safely inside, though she was concerned about something getting inside the bottle and ruining her letter. Melanie looked around her small space, her eyes landing on the cupboard above the stove. She slid out of the dinette seat and stepped over towards the stove, reaching up to open the cupboard and pull out the two, tall, mismatched candles inside. One candle she immediately saw was too wide for the bottle neck and she stuffed it back into the cupboard without looking.

The other was only slightly too big and Melanie grit her teeth as she began to cram the candle in, little chunks and shavings of wax peeling and breaking off as she did, littering the top of her dinette table. When it was solidly jamming up the bottle neck, Melanie snapped off the excess candle, set the bottle down, stepped into her tiny bedroom and grabbed her long cardigan with the hood on it, and jammed her bare feet into her faux-sheepskin boots. Snatching up the bottle again, and the knitted throw blanket laying on the couch side of the dinette, Melanie stepped outside.

The air was chilly, standing there at the bottom of the steps in the dark of the night. She was glad she'd put on the cardigan, and set her handful down on one of the table-less green plastic chairs, so she could pull the hood up. Melanie pulled the chair back, almost flush against the side of the trailer, next to the stairs, and made herself comfortable: bottle sitting on the steps next to her, throw blanket wrapped around her completely, covering herself up from neck to ankle, slouched down in the green plastic chair "waiting.

It had been a few hours since the split last appeared and she figured that if it was going to continue and reappear, it would do so very shortly. The side of the trailer was still warm from the heat that had beat down relentlessly upon it all day, and she could feel some of that heat seeping up her back, which was nice. Other than that, it was very peaceful. _Well, as peaceful as it gets around here_. She could hear her elderly neighbors in the trailer to the right of hers talking in loud, shouty voices; they were going deaf. She could hear a very loud action-movie playing on the TV in the trailer to the left of hers, the guy that lived there always watched his set loud and late into the night, but he was kind of scary, so she had never said anything.

Beyond her immediate neighbors was the sound of trucks on the highway, a couple of streets over. Lulee was singing in her trailer across the small, dirt road that separated the trailers on Melanie's side of the 'street' from the trailers on Tala and Lulee's side. There were only 15 trailers in all in this park, a fact that had drawn Melanie to it in the first place years ago. It was on the very edge of a very small, very neglected little town, and beyond her back yard fence was nothing but dirt, rocks, rough grass patches, and scrub as far as the eye could see " so that was a bonus as well.

Melanie tipped her head back against the back of her green plastic chair, lifting her face to the dark, starry sky, and closed her eyes as a cool breeze came up, ruffling at the sides of her hood. The split would come back, she was certain it would, and this time, _she was going to dish something right back to the person on the other end.

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She didn't realize she'd fallen asleep until she jerked herself awake. It was still dark out, so she knew she'd only been asleep for a couple of hours. Melanie sat up, pushing her hood back off her head, and looked around, trying to figure out what had woken her up. Her neighbors were silent, their trailers dark; everyone was asleep. Then she felt it, the weird tickling and lifting sensation of the little hairs on her arms and back of her neck. The split was coming.

Melanie climbed to her feet, pushing the throw blanket back onto the chair, then grabbing up the message in the beer bottle. She eyed the sky and after a long few seconds, the split appeared, first as a glowing line, then it grew, spreading open and tearing the fabric of the sky. She knew immediately that wherever the other side of the split was, it was daytime there now; it explained why the split was so dark before â€" it had been night in Split Land.

She got as close as she dared to the split's landing site, where her table had once stood, and cocked her arm back. She knew she could make the distance required for the throw, all the little league and softball she'd played in as a kid and a teenager told her that. It was the aim required that worried her. Biting her lips together, Melanie closed her eyes, said a little prayer, and threw the bottle towards the split with as much force as she possibly could. Her entire body sagged in almost overwhelming relief when the bottle made it through the split and didn't fall out again.

She had half expected it to smash against the surface of the split, like it was some kind of one-way street. There was a noise from within the split, she could swear it, something that sounded like a cry of surprise, and then she had only mere seconds to dive out of the way as something metallic came rushing from the split. Landing on her hands and knees, she scuttled across the dirt towards the shelter of the lean-to as the metallic-whatever-it-was, collided with the earth with a large, heavy, clang.

"Holy shit, holy shit, holy shit," she repeated in a breathy whisper to herself, turning around to view her yard and the sky above it. This time there was no denying the yell that came from the split. "Damn it!" A decidedly male and decidedly frustrated voice came out from the split, before the edges of the split wavered and then the whole thing flattened again. Her breathing was heavy and her heart was thundering, as she sat crouched on the little concrete pad that served as the laundry lean-to's floor.

She now knew that there was definitely a person on the other end of the split, and part of her faintly registered that the person had yelled out words in her language (though the accent on those words leaned far closer to British than American, in her opinion), but she was mostly just a little shell shocked. Her bottle had worked. She'd thrown it through and it had apparently startled the person on the other end, enough so that they had dropped whatever the partially rounded metal thing was that was sitting where her green table had used to sit.

Melanie stayed huddled up between the washer and the lean-to wall for

a few minutes longer, giving herself the chance to catch her breath, let her heart slow back to normal, and to gather her racing thoughts a little bit. When she felt slightly more composed, she climbed to her feet and cautiously made her way over to the split's landing pad. She stood gazing down at the metal thing, trying to figure out what the hell it was. She didn't want to touch it, at least not at first.

She stared and stared at it, as it lay in the dusty earth at her feet, taking in the rounded back of the metal object, the open front and bottom revealing it was hollow inside, and the two large protrusions extending up and out from the open front portion. _It's a freaking helmet_, she suddenly realized, bending to pick it up as soon as she'd identified it. It was heavy, but not overly weighty, clearly a real helmet, designed to be sturdy and protective for its owner's head. Once she held it in her hands, she began to back away from the split, pausing only to grab the throw blanket that still sat on the green plastic chair.

Melanie went back inside her trailer, sat the helmet on the end of her bed and then climbed into bed after tossing her cardigan on the floor and removing her boots. She pulled her knees up to her chest, staring at the helmet, wondering _where_ exactly the other side of the split was. Where could you possibly need to wear some kind of suit of armor-type helmet? She stared at the deep gold of the helmet, the green elements to it, and thought it was certainly important looking. If she remembered any medieval movies she watched, only the big-time knights had really fancy suits of armour, with decorations and embellishments, the lowly foot-soldier type typically had plain armor, or none at all.

The elaborate horns on this helmet which curved up and back, away from the face, the green and gold color to it, the details in the metal, even the intricate, exact swooping shape of this helmet all looked special-crafted, specially-made: someone important owned this helmet. _Ok, so some big shot over in Split Land found the split, decided to start throwing his crap in it for some reason, and was holding his helmet while he stood near the split this time, only to get freaked right out when my bottle came sailing through the split, and then he accidentally dropped his helmet?_

She figured that she had the sequence of events pretty accurate, however, what she couldn't explain was _why_. Why_ was someone tossing stuff through the split? Melanie pushed the helmet to the far back corner of her bed, where the mattress was built right into the wall, and stretched out under her blankets. Snuggling against her pillow she reached a hand out without looking and grasped the cord on her little bedside lamp, yanking it and turning the lamp off. She lay wide-eyed in the dark, trying to puzzle out why on earth anyone would want to throw things, random things, through a split in the world.

Melanie yawned and turned over, pulling her blanket up to her chin. _I would never toss random stuff away like that, I'd be too worried I'd hurt someone._ As she drifted off to sleep she realized that it was quite likely that the person on the other end of the split had no idea that there was someone potentially at risk of being squished, and they were simply tossing things through the split to see what would happen to the items; would they bounce back? Come back through the rift destroyed and mangled? The thought she fell asleep on was:

the only reason a person would test out the split with inanimate objects that way was if they were planning to toss something infinitely more precious through, like themselves.

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A loud, electronic bleating tore Melanie from sleep the next morning and she cracked her eyes open to glare at her alarm clock. The early morning sun beaming dully through the light curtains on her little bedside window, was already warm and Melanie irritably kicked her sheets off of herself and swatted at the alarm clock with her free hand.

"Alright, alright," she croaked, finally managing to turn the damn thing off. She sat up in bed and yawned, realizing that she definitely had not given herself enough time to sleep. _That's what you get for staying up all night playing catch with Mr. Helmet,_ she told herself, chuckling a little as she made her way into the washroom. She blindly moved through her simple morning routine: shower, brushing her teeth, dragging a brush through the wet riot of her wavy hair, and finally putting on what she called her 'work uniform', her least worn pair of jeans, a grey tank top and the blue apron that everyone at Marge's wore on shift.

Melanie shovelled back a quick bowl of cereal before grabbing her keys and stuffing her feet into her sneakers. The front steps of her trailer squeaked as she bounced down them, and the door let out its familiar squeal when she shut it and the screen door, locking them closed. Crunching across her dirt and gravel driveway, Melanie glanced across the street, smiling when she saw Tala emerging quietly from the trailer she shared with Lulee, her sister.

"Good morning," Tala said cheerily, in her familiar sleepy voice, "How was your night?" Melanie opened her mouth to respond, but paused, not sure how to reply. Tala fell into step beside her as they walked out of their little trailer park, quiet homes all around them since most of their neighbours were still asleep.

"It was alright," Melanie finally responded, trying to keep her voice from sounding weird, "Mostly just stayed in."

"Did Eli come by?" Tala asked, her tone turning slightly mischievous. Melanie glanced over at her friend, making a face; Tala and Lulee loved to bug her about her and Eli's notoriously on and off relationship. Currently it was off, and everyone seemed to think it was going to be on again sometime soon. Though she would never admit it, Melanie was beginning to think it would be too.

"No he did not," Melanie answered crisply, "I have no idea what Eli was doing last night; we're not together." Tala shrugged and said nothing, seeming to sense that Melanie didn't really want to be ribbed about her ex-boyfriend today. Tala was quiet afterwards, providing a comfortable, companionable silence on their walk to work, something Melanie knew Lulee wouldn't have been capable of doing; Lulee would have pried and pressed for information. When they reached the little parking lot for Marge's, Tala broke off, heading across the lot to the diner she worked at.

"Wanna get together for a beer tonight?" Tala asked before she departed. Melanie waved and smiled, "Sounds good, talk to you later!" She was fully determined to do something more normal than watch the sky for the split tonight, and heading over to her neighbours place for some beer around their little fire pit sounded wonderful. Melanie unlocked the front door of the little grocery store, Marge's Mart, where she worked. Although calling it a grocery store was a brave term " it was more like a catch all food store, which sold little bits and pieces of food and drink, some clothing items, booze, lotto tickets, and also provided a miniature version of a laundromat (Marge had two washers and two dryers near the back of the store that she charged \$0.25 per use on).

Throughout the process of turning the lights and air conditioning on, sweeping the floor and dusting some of the surfaces, Melanie felt herself becoming distanced from the weird scenario with the split. As the morning progressed and people began to come and go, chatting with her and each other, a growing part of her began to wonder if perhaps she'd imagined the entire thing. _Maybe I was actually sleeping all day long and dreamed it, or maybe I hallucinated it all because of too much sun on my head._

The afternoon girl called in sick for her shift, as she sometimes did, leaving Melanie to work that shift in addition to her own. It was nearly dinner before she began the short walk back home, and her feet ached the whole way; Marge's might be a small place, but you were on your feet all day long if you worked there since there was usually only one person on shift at a time.

At home, she took a quick, cool shower, changed into her lighter cotton shorts, re-applied some deodorant, and picked up her phone to give Tala a quick call. Her friend answered on the second ring.

"Hey Tal, it's me," Melanie greeted Tala's sleepy "Hello?"

"Oh, Mel, yeah, that's right, you coming by still?" Tala murmured, sounding like her face was half buried in a pillow.

Melanie glanced at the clock on the stove and shook her head before answering out loud. "I'm gonna do dinner, maybe finish up my laundry, then head over once it's dark out? Alright with you?" Melanie responded easily, knowing Tala wouldn't care either way.

"Sure, yeah, ok, see you," Tala answered in her perpetually sleepy voice, before hanging up. Tala was pretty short on phone etiquette, which bugged some people, though Melanie found it a blessing because she was terrible with social niceties herself.

True to her word, Melanie put her TV dinner in the oven as soon as she got off the phone. Then she turned to glare at the helmet sitting on her dinette. She had managed to ignore it for the past few minutes, but knew that her day of freedom at work was over; she was going to end up fixated on the helmet, its owner, and the split, all night.

***** Next chapter, something a lot bigger than a helmet comes on down *****

***** Aw hell, here's #3, just to get the introductions out of the way... Enjoy guys! *****

The golden, horned helmet seemed to mock her with the mystery of its presence. It provided no answers, just a bunch of questions, and worries. After staring at it mistrustfully for several very long minutes, Melanie pursed her lips and decided to force herself to ignore the helmet some more; there was literally nothing she could do about it right now. She went outside to gather her laundry off the line, unable to help herself from glancing warily up into the darkening sky, which was still blessedly split-free.

She gathered up her sheets and bedding hanging on the line, deciding to start with the bigger laundry items first. Halfway from the drying line to her door, she felt the bizarre frisson to the air again, her stomach flipping over sickeningly. In a daze, fear and anxiety welling up in her throat, Melanie turned to face the split, her arms full of bedding.

The split appeared as it always did, but this time, something was different. As soon as the split opened, there was a strange rushing sensation to the air, and a breeze came billowing out of the split, ruffling her hair, the laundry still on the line, and the bedding in her arms.

When he came plunging down through the split, it wasn't as big of a surprise as she thought it should have been. Part of her had expected this, expected that Mr. Helmet would come for his lost headgear. He fell fast and heavy, landing with a hefty thud, a whoosh of dirt rippling out from where he landed. He came through with a kind of grace though, landing purposefully and neatly in a half crouch, a staff in one hand, dark clothing snapping out around him and fluttering to land with him on the dry earth in her yard.

When he turned his face up, taking in his surroundings, Melanie felt her jaw twitch. He's human, she thought wildly, a weird kind of relief flooding her veins, pleased that he wasn't a monster or terrifying alien. His skin looked very pale in the dusky evening light, his dark hair adding to the ivory tone.

When his gaze landed on her, she couldn't do anything but blink stupidly at him, knowing her eyes were huge and goggling, her mouth hanging open. He climbed immediately to his feet when saw her, his stance wary and rigid. Melanie closed her mouth and swallowed thickly, trying to bring moisture to her mouth so she could talk. She ended up just staring at him some more.

"Is this Midgard?" He asked her, his tone serious, but somehow hopeful as well. She didn't understand. Her mind raced as she ran the term 'Midgard' through her temporarily stunned mental vocabulary and came up blank. Instead of saying no or shaking her head though, some part of her decided that she should just stare at him a little more, so she did.

He inclined his head expectantly towards her, one dark eyebrow raising slightly. "Can you understand me?" He asked, his tone a little slower, his words a little more deliberate. She nodded twice, her eyes not leaving his face. He made a face, clearly irritated with her and waved a hand in her direction.

"So, is it?" He asked, impatience seeping into his words. Melanie blinked rapidly several times in a row, and then licked her lips, before her eyes darted up to the sky, checking for the split. It was gone. His clothing rustled slightly when he took a step towards her, and that seemed to break through the stunned fog of her thoughts. She took several quick, startled steps backwards, away from him, until her backside connected with the washing machine with a hearty _clang_, and he stopped moving.

"What's Midgard?" She managed to get out, her voice rasping dryly. He took a breath and looked up at the sky for a moment, as if searching for a word. "What do you people call it?" He spoke, obviously to himself, "Ah, yes, Earth â€" this _is_ Earth, correct?" Melanie nodded at that, a little ripple of fear tingling down her spine, and then onwards, all the way to her toes. He simply looked amused and turned away, carefully taking in his surroundings with interest.

"Remarkable," he murmured to himself, "Too easy." He smirked and shook his head and then suddenly looked towards her intently, his brow drawing together. "You're the one," he said clearly.

"What?" She replied, feeling distantly embarrassed that her voice sounded stupid and squeaky. He took 3 quick steps closer to her, and she leaned back against the washer, as if she could press through it, her arms still full of her clean sheets and blanket. "Stop," she blurted out, her tone finally sounding slightly surer of itself. He paused, though his look clearly said he didn't need to and was only humouring her.

He tilted his head to the side and regarded her calmly. "You threw the bottle at me," he replied, his tone indicating that had been an exceptionally wayward thing to do. "I didn't throw it at you," she shot back almost immediately, defensively.

He shook his head slightly at her hasty reply. "Yes, you did," he answered her, his tone growing firmer, "You threw it at me and made me drop my helmet, which I'd like back now, by the way." Melanie pressed her lips together in frustration, all of the shock from his appearance suddenly draining from her because of his accusations. She didn't like his accusatory tone, nor did she like the implication that he was somehow the victim in all of this.

In a huff, she turned and dumped her laundry on top of the washer and then turned back to him, before taking a step towards him, her hands planting themselves on her hips. "Excuse me?" She snapped, her temper rising up when she thought about her now-destroyed, much-loved, green patio table, "_You_ have been tossing shit at me through the split for almost two days!"

Her hands dropped from her hips and she felt one hand ball into a fist while the other lifted up to point angrily at him. "I was minding my own business when you began to drop _garbage_ in my yard, and you destroyed my property!" Her cry was angry, and she knew she was glaring at him now. For his part he stood still and watched her with mild, detached, interest.

"I _had_ to throw that bottle, to get you to stop, before you tossed something big enough to crush my home through the split! So excuse

me if I'm not rushing to apologize to _you_," she finished, her heart thundering in her chest, and in her ears. One of his dark eyebrows flickered upwards briefly and he smirked at her again.

"A thousand apologies," he replied easily, amusement and condescension lacing his words. Melanie crossed her arms over her chest at the tone and wished she could just walk by him and make him go away. _You are sooo out of your depth here kid,_ she warned herself.

"It's a portal," he spoke lightly, breaking her train of thought. Melanie's eyes darted up to meet his own. "What?" She asked, her tone slightly bewildered. He nodded his head, indicating the sky with his chin.

"You called it a split; it's not, it's a portal between my world and your own," he explained. He was watching her carefully, and the intensity of his gaze didn't make his explanation any easier to hear. She looked away, wanting to break the eye contact, and shrugged.

"Ok, portal, whatever," she conceded. Things were silent for a moment before he cleared his throat and she turned her gaze to him again. "My helmet?" He queried, both eyebrows shooting up a little. She nodded, swallowing reflexively, and started to side step away from him, not wanting to turn her back on him. He chuckled a little bit.

"I've no ill-intentions for you, little Midgardian, just go get the helmet, please," his assurance was condescending and that got her back up a little bit, but she didn't stop to flaunt any ego this time, instead scurrying for the steps to her trailer and stumbling inside as quickly as possible. She pulled the door shut behind her and felt herself sag in momentary relief at being away from him. The helmet sat imposing and out-of-place on her dinette as it had before. Reaching for it, Melanie paused when she realized her trailer smelled like burning.

"Dinner! Shit!" She cried loudly and angrily, wrenching open her little oven and using an oven mitt to extract the tray holding her burnt-to-a-crisp TV dinner, dumping the whole thing into the sink in frustration.

She was about to close the oven door when she heard the door to her trailer yank open behind her, the whole thing lurching slightly when the strange split-visitor launched himself inside and directly into her, which knocked her towards the oven, her bare knee landing directly and completely against the inside of the hot, open, oven door.

"God_dammit!_" She yelled, the pain instant, blinding, and nearly overwhelming. Melanie tipped sideways, away from the oven door and fell to her side on the floor, listening as the movement caused everything in her cupboards to ring and tinkle.

"What is going on in here?" He spoke loudly, urgently, almost angrily. Melanie clutched at her knee, hissed at the pain of her own touch, and released her knee almost instantly, and then began to drag herself backwards, away from him and the oven door. She reached the edge of her bed and used it to haul herself to her feet, wincing and

gasping sharply when her knee stretched and bent beneath the rather large, angry burn on it.

"Justâ€¦ just... take your helmet and go!" She yelled at him, the pain of the burn pushing useless tears into her voice and make her eyes water. She waved a hand at the dinette where the helmet sat, and he looked over to it, before gesturing at her.

"You're injured," he remarked, his voice matter of fact.

"No shit, Sherlock, you pushed me into an oven! Please, just take the stupid helmet and go!" She cried, managing to leverage her butt onto the edge of her bed, finally looking down at the burn. It was big, raw, and horrifyingly misshapen already.

The familiar creak of her oven door being closed surprised her and she looked up to see the split-man closing it, before he twisted slightly and removed his outer wear, which appeared to be a heavy, green cape, worn over elegant, yet somehow simple clothing beneath. Clothing that looked like it belonged in a rich, historical era, not in New Mexico, in her trailer which smelled of burnt Salisbury steak. He lay the garment over the back of the dinette and rested his staff against the wall behind the door.

He strode towards her, which really only meant walking a couple steps, and then dropped to a graceful crouch before her, pushing her hands away from the burn impatiently.

"Is there no light in this wretched hovel at all?" He muttered to himself, grasping the bottom of her knee in one large, cool hand, pulling it closer to his view. Melanie reached towards the wall, to flick on the bedroom ceiling light, all while trying to pull her knee away from him. She was so uncomfortable with his closeness that she felt panic growing inside her alongside the pain flaming out from her knee.

"Please let go," she spoke automatically, pulling on the grasp he had, and then sucking in a pained gasp when her own movement made the hurting even worse. He shot her an exasperated look.

"I'm not going to harm you, you seem quite capable of that all on your own, so do sit still," he ordered her. She wanted to fight, her entire life's stranger-danger training rushing to the forefront of her burn-addled mind, but her knee felt like the sun was on fire inside of it and was trying to burn through the damaged skin there.

His other hand came to rest on top of the burn, and she tensed in expectation of horrific pain, but instead there was only a cooling sensation. The cooling feeling was so incredible, and such an instant contrast to the burn, that it felt like she was deflating in relief, hissing out a long, slow breath as her body relaxed with the absence of the pain.

"Oh thank god," she murmured, "What are you doing?" He looked up from his intense scrutiny of her knee, which was now held between his hands.

"I have a little talent for healing, but especially burns," he explained briefly, before lifting his top hand slightly, to peer

beneath it, "Now, sit still."

She did as he said and watched in fascination as a very faint glow seemed to emanate from beneath his hand. It felt like he was blasting the burn with an arctic winter. The feeling was strange, but so wonderful compared to the bone deep pain of the burn, she couldn't complain. A dim part of her mind was fully aware that what was happening right now was not first aid, at least not any she'd ever seen. It was definitely other-worldly, and over the borderline straight into magical.

Really, though, after the split, are you shocked? And she wasn't; she supposed it was a little disconcerting that this man who had fallen from the sky was apparently able to heal people with just his really cold hands, but she'd been watching the sky split open for well over a day by now, as random objects fell from the heavens, so she forced herself to be ok with this newest turn of events now.

"There," he spoke quietly, lifting his hands from her skin. The absence of the cold touch left her feeling oddly-bereft for a moment, before she realized that her skin was entirely healed beneath. Melanie swiftly pulled her knee away from him, clutching it to her chest so she could stare at the unmarred skin. "Oh my god," she marvelled, "It's not even scarred!" Her skin was utterly smooth and whole, even the scar from the bad bicycle accident she'd had as a child was gone.

Her gaze darted to him, where he stayed crouched at her feet next to the bed. He looked smug and pleased and she couldn't help smile a little at the expression. "Thank you," she replied, "That hurt more than you can imagine, so thank you."

He nodded and got to his feet. "You are welcome, it's the least I could do after destroying your possessions, I suppose," his reply sounded haughty, but she could sense that he definitely felt rather proud of himself, she guessed he didn't get the chance to heal people often.

"Yeah, I guess we're even," she answered, grunting a little as she slid to the end of the bed, getting to her feet there. Her trailer was small, the bedroom area positively miniscule, and when she stood next to him in the cramped space, she became very aware of how large he was. He was very tall, taller than Eli even, though not as beefy as Eli was. This man was a lot like a jungle predator, long and lean, with a lithe musculature that could be called graceful. _Bottom line though, just plain tall_. She wasn't a very tall woman herself, so his closeness made her nervous again, and she bumped back a step.

"Ok so," she began, stepping backwards from him some more, suddenly very aware that she was wearing her ridiculous cotton PJ shorts, not something she wore anywhere except alone around her own house, and a tank top, and that was it. He seemed aware that she was uncomfortable again, as she backed away from him, almost to the other side of the trailer, because he was smiling at her; a mischievous grin, a mostly amused grin.

"Thanks for the burn help," she managed lamely, waving a hand at the helmet, "You can go now." He walked towards her, reaching for the

helmet and opening his mouth to respond, when there was knocking at her door. "Mel?" She heard Lulee call from outside.

"_No_," Melanie groaned in a low, throaty tone; Lulee was literally the last person in the known universe that she needed to have standing outside her door right now. Her eyes darted over to the split-man and he gave her a mildly puzzled, yet still amused look, his eyebrows raising again.

"Shit," Melanie said quietly, taking several steps towards him, brushing past him anxiously, her previous concerns regarding his presence now replaced with new worries "if news of this visitor got out, it would be awful for her: unwanted attention, annoying questions, not to mention that Eli would likely think that she'd been messing around with an alien. _Oh my god, who cares about Eli right now " focus!_"

"You need to hide, and for god's sake stay quiet, please!" She urgently hissed at her unwelcome split-visitor, waving in the general direction of the bedroom. His eyebrow flickered up again, and he smiled slightly, but nodded and stepped back towards the bedroom. He would be mostly out of view if she blocked the door properly.

Taking a deep breath, Melanie reached for the door and pulled it open, plastering a fake-welcoming smile on her face when she was greeted with Lulee's overly-made-up face on the other side. Melanie curved her body around in front of the door, closing it most of the way behind herself.

"Are you alright?" Lulee asked, one thin, plucked eyebrow lifting, "We heard a commotion!" Melanie nodded along with her friend's words, trying to appear nonchalant.

"Oh yeah, definitely everything is fine. I'm fine! I burnt dinner and it made me mad!" Melanie blundered through her response, halting in the wrong places, cursing her innate inability to lie properly. Lulee pursed her lips, letting her heavily outlined eyes roam slowly over Melanie's hair, down her face, over her warm-weather PJs and down to her bare feet.

"You sure that's all that's going on?" Lulee's voice was lilting playfully, and Melanie put a hand to her hair suddenly, feeling without seeing that it was a mussed up, floofy disaster from throwing herself to the ground after falling into the oven.

"I don't know what you mean," Melanie said innocently, deciding to flat out play dumb. _Lulee can smell fear, don't let her get a whiff._

Lulee smiled at her again, winking a little when she hinted, "Sounds like you finally moved on from old Eli for good!" Melanie winced, certain that she had to find a way to correct Lulee's assumptions _right now_, or else Eli was going to be told that she was screwing around with other guys, of that Melanie had no doubt. _She works fast, you can't let her spread the word._

"Lu, there is no one here," Melanie deadpanned, waving a hand in the general direction of the front of the trailer, "Do you see a car out front? No one is here but me!"

Lulee tossed her head and smirked a little. "Why, yes there is!" Lulee exclaimed delighted, "That blue one, right there!" Melanie blinked stupidly and stepped down the stairs, shoving past Lulee immediately, making her way out of her yard and around front.

"That's impossible! Unless someone else is in my spot!" Melanie declared hotly. She rounded the house and saw nothing there, groaning at her own stupidity.

"Shhheeeeeiiiiit," she groaned to herself, running back around to the other side of the trailer, to her door. "Lulee! Wait! I can explain!" She called, bouncing up the steps and into the trailer.

It was too late though, because Lulee was already inside.

4. Chapter 4

***** Enjoy! *****

Lulee was standing over by the bathroom, the open door in her hand as she looked around, disappointment clear on her face. Melanie felt herself go tongue-tied as she herself looked around in mild confusion. _What the hell? Where'd he go?_

"Guess you really were all alone," Lulee pronounced with breathy nonchalance, "You really should quit talking to yourself so much, Mel, you're giving people the wrong idea! To think! If I hadn't of come in here, I would have been honour bound to mention to Eli that you were messing around on him!"

Melanie growled and rolled eyes, stepping back from her doorway, holding the door open with one hand and pointing at the door way with her other. "Out, Lu, out now," Melanie demanded irritably, "Not that it's any of your damn business, but Eli and I are not together right now, so I could have _seven_ men in here right now, and it's none of his business, _or yours."_

Lulee sauntered by her, unoffended by Melanie's ire as she always was. "Sure thing, sugar," she answered Melanie's vehemence dismissively, stepping outside onto the steps again and gesturing vaguely towards her trailer across the way, "You coming over for a beer tonight? Eli is coming too."

Melanie couldn't help the quick glance around her trailer, at how it was empty and helmetless. _I could, butâ€¦_ "I am just so damn tired, Lu â€" give my regrets to Tala, because I'll probably just stay in!" She exclaimed, before soundly closing the door on her nosy, infuriating neighbor's face.

She stepped towards the door, locking it, glad to be rid of Lulee, and secretly glad that the helmet guy had managed to sneak out and was out of her hair. She leaned her forehead against the plastic door and closed her eyes, letting out a deep breath. "Thank the lord," she muttered.

"Does this mean I'm invited to stay for the evening?" His voice came from behind her and Melanie screamed aloud in fear, whirling around, a hand flying up to her chest.

"Jesus-rollerskating-christ!" She cried, knowing she must be flushed tomato red and fear-sweating across her forehead, "How are you still _in_ _here?"_

He was sitting casually on the far side of her dinette, his helmet in front of himself, and he casually nodded towards the outside of her trailer, pointing with his chin, obviously indicating Lulee. "She did not seem to want to respect your boundaries," he replied evenly, "Nor was she intelligent enough to understand or appreciate our current situation; I thought it best that she did not know I was here."

Melanie stared at him blankly for a few moments, her thundering heart slowly returning to a more normal pace. "So you magicked yourself away?" She asked incredulously, knowing that her words were not quite right to describe what had happened, but was uncertain what _would_ work.

He shrugged. "More or less," he replied. Melanie swallowed and looked away. "That's a neat trick, mister," she muttered, closing her eyes for a moment, trying to figure out what to do now, how to get him out of her house and away without anyone seeing him. _Eli is right across the goddamn street! What if he wants to stop by?_

"You want me to leave," he stated, his tone calm, but mildly amused. Her eyes widened as she turned back to him.

"I didn't say that!" She replied quickly. His face remained even, although one eyebrow quirked up slightly. He didn't say anything, just remained casually seated at her dinette, one arm slung along the backrest of the bench seat. His long fingers tapped slowly and idly at the nubbly brown fabric there.

Melanie ran her fingers through her hair, and then stopped, yanking her arms down when she remembered that she wasn't wearing a bra. "So, yeah," she started, easing her way past the dinette, to the bedroom end of the trailer, "I just have to do something." She grabbed the accordion door that cut the tiny bedroom chunk off from the rest of the trailer when it was pulled out and closed, a door she rarely ever used, and yanked it out of the wall where it was normally folded.

The door made a series of scratching noises, scraping noises, and plastic-y squealing noises as she urged it open, each noise louder than the next, and the entire process going in awkward fits and starts. _This is not the exit I wanted to make, _she thought to herself in chagrin.

He didn't turn around when he spoke lightly over his shoulder, "If your intent is to change your attire, you simply could have asked me not to look."

Melanie stopped, staring at the back of his head, and wishing with all her might she could just be grabbing her cardigan and going across the street, sitting with her friends, sitting with Eli. Instead she finally managed to hook the accordion door to its opposite wall. The bedroom felt beyond cramped, but she moved quickly, ripping off her tank top, and pulling on a bra, before pulling the tank back on. She crouched and pulled the pj shorts down,

kicking them backwards onto her bed, pausing to marvel at the smooth uninjured skin on her knee once again.

Shaking her head briskly, partially wondering if she was actually on her death bed somehow, and this was all a fevered coma dream, like in the soaps, she grabbed herself underwear, a regular pair of shorts, and pulled them on. The last thing she grabbed, even though it was still stinking hot outside, was her trusty cardigan, laying it out on edge of the bed.

When she was done, she eased the accordion door back into its little niche in the wall, her eyes cautiously running over the figure of her guest. _Yeah, "guest"._ She walked past him and stood on the far end of her trailer, facing him, easing herself up to sit on the little counter edge that ran past the stove. His eyes ran over her quickly, as if assessing her clothing change briefly, before he turned his head to look back out the window.

Nothing was said for a few long moments. The tension was killing her. She scratched at the side of her face for a moment, wondering how to phrase what she wanted to ask him. "You are wondering why I have not yet left," he asked quietly, the strange formality still in his voice. She shrugged and looked down at where her fingers where coiled together idly in her lap.

"It has crossed my mind, yeah," she replied uneasily, "I mean, I'm sure this has all been just peachy for you, but you strike me as someone with better things to do than hide in my trailer." He smirked, turning his eyes back to hers.

"I certainly do have 'better things to do'," he told her, his gaze not moving from hers, "Unfortunately for us both, I'm stuck here until I'm able to get through the portal again."

"What?" She asked, startled by the statement, the word coming out a lot more sharply than she had intended. He dipped his head in minute acknowledgement.

"It's not a door that always swings both ways," he calmly explained, "That would defeat the purpose of such an obscure pass between our worlds even existing." She blinked stupidly at him, wondering if he actually thought she should or could understand that explanation.

"Is it on a timer?" She asked carefully, struggling to say something that made sense. One of his eyebrows came up as he dipped his head towards her.

"You could very easily say that," he answered her, "More specifically, even when the portal does open, it will not always be large enough to admit me." Melanie turned her head, leaning towards the window she was sitting against and pulling the curtain to the side briefly, peeking outside. This window faced the street and she could see Tala and Lulee's from here. Eli's motorcycle was sitting out front and she felt a wave of longing to be over there.

"The split has always been the same size on this end," she muttered, "Don't know how you could tell." He got up abruptly then, moving towards her quickly. Alarmed, Melanie dropped the curtain and turned to him as he approached, her hands gripping tightly at the edge of

the counter she sat on.

"You're saying that even with my arrival, you could not tell the difference?" He asked, a trace of urgency in his voice. His brow had drawn down over his eyes, and the effect on the angular planes of his face was utterly terrifying. Melanie felt like her mouth had completely dried up, and her gaze darted away uneasily.

"I never could," she stammered, "It was always the same, the only change was the air, there was a lot of it blowing out of the split right before you fell through." He stood directly in front of her, any path to hop off the counter and move away blocked by him.

"To think I must rely on the retellings of a child," he murmured in disgust, turning away suddenly in frustration. He was silent, but still too close for her to hop down, and Melanie could feel her toes curling. He moved away then, sitting on the edge of the dinette.

"This will take some time," he spoke to himself, this she knew right away, but that didn't stop her from sliding off the counter and moving towards her door, unlocking it, and opening it. She tried to be casual, as she stepped outside, but she got no further. His cold, hard hand gripped her upper arm, preventing her from going anywhere, and she let out a little squawk of dismay.

He pulled her back inside, not roughly, but firmly, and released her arm when she stood before him. "Where are you going?" He asked her calmly. "Outside," she answered him immediately. He rolled his eyes.

"I believe that part was obvious," he told her sarcasm lacing his tone, "However, I'm more interested in where you intended to go."

"You need to leave," she said quietly, making brief eye contact with him and then letting her gaze skate away in discomfort. He chuckled.

"Believe me, little wretch, that is exactly what I wish to do," he told her, a slight laugh in his voice, "However it would seem that I did not think this through quite as well as one might hope." He was silent for a moment before he laughed a little at himself.

"What do you mean?" She asked, her worry mingled with a little curiosity. He lifted a dark eyebrow before looking back at her.

"I can't just leap through the portal whenever I please, it must be the correct size," he paused, pursing his lips for a moment, "At least it must be the correct size on the other side, in Asgard." She said nothing when he turned to look back out the window, allowing him to continue.

"However, it would seem that since the portal is always the same size here, that the same restriction does not exist, unfortunately that would also seem to indicate that it will be nearly impossible to tell when the portal is large enough on the other side to permit me the access required," his explanation was voiced drily, but she could sense real concern behind the words.

Melanie nodded, and asked the expected question: "What happens if you try to get through and the receiving end is too small? Will you bounce back?" His lips twitched as if he were trying to smile, but couldn't quite muster it.

"No," he said flatly, "I will be rejected from the other end and unable to return here, doomed to spend an eternity in a place of no space and time. Either that, or I'll be torn into a thousand bloody pieces."

Melanie was startled by such an admission; he looked morose as he explained such a dark possibility. She could hardly even imagine that such a thing could be true, and if it _was_ trueâ€|

"Why in the hell would you even risk _coming _here?" She blurted out, unable to hold it back, her eyebrows pulling together in concern, "That's seems really stupid." He looked over at her, surprised at her outburst and also a little irritated she had called him stupid.

"You would question my motivations? _You?_ A meaningless splotch on the tapestry of my existence?" His response was insulted, and condescending. Condescension triggered her ire. Melanie planted her hands on her hips.

"A splotch? Give me a break buddy, _your_ existence is the meaningless one from my side of things. Get a little perspective before you go nose diving onto other people's planets!" She shot back at him in frustration, her own brow drawing down into a glare. He got to his feet suddenly, startling her, and she stumbled back a step, her behind connecting with the still-warm oven, which was thankfully closed.

"Do you have any idea who you're speaking to, you insolent little wretch? I could destroy you," he threatened her, waving a hand off to the side in displeasure, "All of you are entirely beneath me."

Swallowing hard and then wetting her lips, Melanie ventured out onwards once more, unable to stop herself, although her tone was a lot less angry this time. "You seem to dislike us 'Midgardians'," she hooked her fingers in the air around the word, "Seems strange that you were willing to jump through a dangerous space hole just to get here, don't you think?"

He narrowed his eyes at her, and she forced herself to hold eye contact this time. "This planet is merely a means to an end," he replied flatly, "The choice had naught to do with its measly inhabitants, and everything to do with forwarding my own ends."

"Then I'm sure you won't mind getting the hell out of my house, and going to deal with _your own ends_ somewhere else," Melanie spoke quietly and his face stilled. Narrowed eyes still firmly held her gaze and she felt her heart pattering along at a much more rapid pace as she tried to keep her backbone stiff. _Do not back down,_ _he wouldn't have helped your burn just to squish you like a bug now._

"The portal has clearly chosen this location, therefore, this location is where I will remain," he answered her smoothly, a lot of

the anger leaving his face. She almost stamped her foot.

"You can't stay here!" She hollered at him, surprising him, "This is my house and I'm telling you to leave. Don't make me call the police." She crossed her arms in a huff, her hands each gripping the opposite elbow tightly.

"Your threats are meaningless," he said dismissively, turning away from her and settling onto the couch portion of her dinette, "Go about your business, little wretch, I will stay only as long as I absolutely must, and you may share the same space with me, or leave, that choice, I leave to you."

She stared at him in surprise for a long moment, her mouth hanging open a little in disbelief at his audacity to ignore her demands. "I can't beli â€" you can't be serious, Iâ€|" Melanie couldn't find anything to say that didn't sound silly, so instead, she turned to her phone, picking it up from the cradle and rapidly dialing 911.

The line clicked several times, as the call connected way out in Santa Fe. "911, what is your emergency?" The bored sounding operator on the other end answered and Melanie opened her mouth to respond.

The unwanted Mr. Helmet hissed at her from his seat, "I will only make myself unseen if you call your guards in. They will find nothing here but you: a little wretched girl dressed in hardly more than her small clothes, ranting about a visitor who fell from the sky."

Melanie's hand gripped the phone, realizing instantly that he was right. At least about the ranting; what the hell are small clothes?

"Hello? Are you there, are you alright?" The operator asked, her tone changing, become slightly more interested in the call.

"Ah â€" uh, no I'm sorry," Melanie managed to stammer out, "My kid, damn kid, he was playing with the phone, I'm so embarrassed â€" sorry!"

"Miss, are you sure?" The operator sounded a lot more irritated now, and Melanie swallowed hard, knowing it was going to be difficult to sound nonchalant.

"I am, he is so grounded! Sorry! Bye!" Melanie chirped stupidly, and then slammed the phone down. She stood at the phone, staring down at it, feeling her face and neck bloom red with humiliation and frustration.

"Smart girl," he muttered from the couch and Melanie whirled to face him, growing greatly pissed off. He had grabbed one of her paperbacks and was perusing the back cover.

"I didn't ask for this!" She said loudly, her voice tight with annoyance, "You can't just stay here and think that's ok! This is my home!_ You barged into my home!_"

"And?" He answered shortly, disinterestedly, not looking up from the

paperback that he had just flipped open, infuriating her.

"GET OUT," she said loudly, through teeth clenched so tightly that she worried she might chip a tooth. He looked back up at her from his seat finally and rolled his eyes, before sighing and climbing to his feet, tossing the book behind himself haphazardly.

"Please understand this," he spoke in a low voice, a voice bordering on threatening, stepping closer to her, looking down at her. A frisson of fear went up her spine, making her hair stand on end.

"You are restful on the eyes, and have amused me thus far, but do not make the error of thinking that I won't simply put an end to you, if you continue to make a nuisance of yourself," the volume of his words was soft, but she understood the message well enough.

"I am a patient man, but I am not a tolerant one, and I am very near the end of tolerating your ridiculous and shrill protests," he hissed at her now, and she found herself nodding. As soon as she did, he nodded himself and stepped back, the dark moment and dark look gone from his face.

He clapped his hands once, and said in mock-cheeriness, "Excellent, I am so glad we could agree on what is best for you, my little wretch. Now I suggest you run along with your insignificant, plebeian existence, and leave me to my thoughts."

She didn't want to, but she decided that if she didn't get some space, she was only likely to piss Mr. Helmet off further and was not interested in finding out what kind of damage his magic could inflict, as opposed to healing.

Muttering under her breath, Melanie stomped to her bedroom, grabbing her cardigan and stuffing her bare feet into her sheepskin boots. She paused at the fridge to grab the last full six-pack she had and then stomped towards the door. Wrenching it open, she paused on the threshold and glared back at him over her shoulder.

He looked up at her, eyebrows going up in feigned interest, waiting for her to speak. She opened and closed her mouth a few times, not sure what to say that wouldn't be construed as a nuisance. She finally snapped her mouth closed and took in a breath, settling on shooting him a very irritated look, before she slammed out the door and down her steps.

As she crunched through the gravel towards the front of her trailer, intent on Tala and Lulee's after all, she swore she could hear him laughing at her from back inside.

5. Chapter 5

***** Enjoy! *****

"Baby, you shoulda worn some pants," Eli scolded her quietly, reaching a hand out to run his fingers down the bare side of her knee. His fingers were very warm, and Melanie was feeling chilled, summer nights dropped the temperature pretty quickly, and although she'd long since put her cardigan on, which covered her shorts-clad

thighs up to the knee, she was still chilly. She'd pulled her knees up, hugging them to her chest in front of the fire pit they all sat around, cursing herself for not grabbing pants.

She slowly pulled her legs out of his reach, despite the warmth of his skin. "Eli, don't," she murmured, looking right at him, "And don't call me 'baby', you know we're not a couple." His good natured face frowned a little as he nodded, looking away.

"You sure?" He finally asked her, a little mischievous tilt to his lips and she had to laugh at him. "Pretty damn sure," she replied, before grabbing up her current can of beer and draining the last of it. The cool drink sent a shiver through her body, and she knew if she wanted to stay out here any longer (and she did want to stay out longer, she was only 4 cans into the six-pack), she would need to run across the lane to her place and snag some sweat pants.

Stretching, Melanie climbed to her feet and waved a lazy hand back at her place. "I'm gonna go grab some warmer pants, I'll be back in a couple minutes," she told her friends. Tala looked up from her cigarette and shrugged, and Lulee and her current guy didn't bother looking up from the make-out session they were in at the moment.

"Right," Melanie said, turning away, her gaze snagging on Eli's for a moment as he looked up at her hopefully. The fire was turning his rich brown hair into a strange flaming orange color, but he was still the same Eli, handsome, thick-built, and sweet. She pressed her lips together and looked away, knowing he was hoping she'd ask him to go with her, and knowing that if she opened her mouth to say anything to him, she might end up asking, the habit of being with him was so ingrained.

She shook off her 4-beer haze when she reached the gate to her yard, realizing then it was a good thing she hadn't encouraged Eli, because Mr. Helmet was still squatting in her trailer. _Can't believe I almost forgot,_ she mentally scolded herself, _Eli is taking up way too much real estate in my head still._ She sighed to herself as she closed the gate behind herself, crunching across her gravelled yard and up the bouncing steps. She pulled the door open and sure enough, there was Mr. Helmet, lounging across the couch, reading the paperback.

"The portal opened once while you were gone, but it wouldn't even accept a box of that horror you call 'cereal'," he told her absent-mindedly, not looking up from the book. Melanie was still standing in the open doorway and felt her hand tense up on the doorknob.

"Please tell me you aren't testing _my_ things out on the split!" She said angrily, "Haven't you ruined enough of my stuff?" He turned to look at her, and did a mild double take, his eyes darting down to her chin and back up again. She knew that sitting in front of the fire, and downing 4 beers in 1 hour, had left her flushed, and she hoped he wouldn't think she was embarrassed for any reason.

"What?" She finally snapped, still in the doorway, his examination making her uncomfortable. He shrugged and looked away, back at the book.

"Nothing," he said haughtily, "It seems the night air agrees with you." She had no idea what to make of that, but her eyes moved past him, to the kitchen counter, where one of her two cereal bowls sat, filled to the brim with Honey Nut Cheerios.

"So, where's the box now?" She asked, and he didn't move except to point with one finger towards her back yard. Melanie hit the switch on her outside light and the yard was faintly illuminated, showing bits and pieces of the cereal box and the cereal, exploded all over her yard.

Growling under her breath, "Great, that's going to be a lot of fun to clean up," Melanie took another step inside, starting to pull the door closed behind her, when she heard the familiar creek of her gate and froze. Eli walked into the yard, a sheepish smile on his face.

"Hey," he said simply, looking a little startled when she immediately flicked the outside light off. _There is no way I'll be able to come up with a good excuse for why that cereal box is exploded all over my yard. _"Eli!" She greeted him, her voice sounding startled and off, "Uh, why are you here?"

He said nothing, just stepped closer, to the bottom of the steps, where she was locked in place. "I wanted to make sure you got back alright I guess, make sure everything is ok," he commented, smiling at her hopefully again, lifting his arm and sliding it around her waist where she stood in front of him. Standing on the top step made it so that he wasn't such a huge amount taller than her, and their faces were more even with each other.

"Eli," she said softly, trying to stop him from getting any closer, because she knew she would definitely give in, part of her wanting to, the other part utterly horrified because Mr. Helmet was less than two feet behind her.

"What," he whispered, leaning in to seal the deal. She reached a hand up, putting it on his mouth and pushing him back gently. "I came for warmer pants, let me get them," she said easily, hoping he would go along.

And of course he went along, he was the most agreeable and pleasant person she'd ever met in her entire life. His face dropped momentarily with guilt. "Oh â€" Christ, I'm sorry, Mel! You're cold, go ahead!" He urged her, and she risked a peek over her shoulder, making sure that her unwelcome guest understood they had company and had magicked himself away again. The trailer was empty and she couldn't stop the grateful smile from moving across her face for a moment.

Melanie turned and went inside, wincing a little when Eli followed her â€" she wanted to tell him to wait outside in the yard, but knew that would be weird of her to ask, and would raise suspicion. She bee lined for her tiny dresser built into the wall at the bedroom end, and immediately began to dig around for the pants, pushing her boots off with her feet as she did. She reached up for the accordion door, meaning to close it and Eli took a step towards her.

"I was thinking, we could spend the night in here, just the two of us," he murmured to her, holding up a hand to stop her from closing

the door. Eli reached her and pulled the pants from her hands, throwing them onto the bed blindly. He held her face carefully between his two hands and bent to her, kissing her softly and quickly, before she had much reaction time.

She should have immediately pushed him away, but, goddammit, she missed him so much, missed this; they hadn't seen each other in over a week, and hadn't touched each other in over two. For a guy she'd been on again and off again with since she was 16, she just couldn't get enough of him if they'd been off again for too long.

"Mel, I miss you so much," he spoke in an earnest rumble, his breath in her hair. Melanie lifted her hands to his face, touching him, but also trying to push him back a little. "I miss you too, Eli, I just don't know if right now â€" she began, but cut-off with a startled, breathy little half-gasp, half-shriek. She'd looked past Eli's broad shoulders and caught a glimpse of that damned Mr. Helmet, standing at the other end of the trailer, his eyebrows quirked up in interest and mockery.

Eli jumped a foot and whirled around, but before Melanie's eyes, her visitor just vanished. One instant he was right there and the next he was simply gone â€" she'd never seen anything like it, and it left her heart pounding.

"What?" Eli said loudly, worry in his voice, "What was it?" He turned back to her, taking in her wide eyes, and open mouth. Melanie turned her gaze up to him and blinked a couple of times.

"Mel, baby, what is it?" He asked her worriedly. She swallowed and found her voice, managing to stammer out, "I thought I saw the biggest spider." Eli stared at her like she'd lost her mind, before shrugging and turning back to the other half of the trailer. Before she could stop him, he was moving down the center of the trailer, head down, obviously looking for the spider.

"Eli!" She yelped in alarm, wondering what the hell could happen if he walked into the invisible man. Eli stomped through where the other man had just disappeared, no harm done, and turned to her, his face slightly confused. "There is nothing here, hon," he told her, soothingly, "And it's so small in here, I don't think I'd miss it." Melanie felt like she was going to go crazy.

Sighing, and reaching out to snag her pants, she gestured at Eli. "I think you should go back, I'll be over in a minute," she said quietly, trying not to sound disappointed; any other night and she knew they'd wind up in bed together, definitely on again. Eli couldn't keep the hang dog expression from his face and it made her laugh a little. She walked over to him, stepping gingerly, worried about where the invisible man actually was, and reached up, cupping the side of Eli's face.

"Neither of us is going anywhere," she whispered to him, "We can come back to this tomorrow, or the day after, you know?" He watched her with soft eyes for a moment before leaning down and kissing her forehead. Eli turned for the door, opening it and stepping outside, pausing on the bottom step.

"Mel?" Eli asked her, and she turned to him, both hands gripping the pants now in a strangle-hold, her face flickering as she madly tried

to keep the panic and anxiety of her face; the invisible man was playing with her hair right now, at the back of her head, she could feel it and it was making it impossible for her to think. She was also livid because she knew he was absolutely doing this on purpose.

"Yes?" She managed to reply, struggling to sound normal, and struggling not to reach back and swat as hard as possible at the unseen fingers in her hair. Eli smiled up her, not seeing anything wrong.

"Better hurry before Tala takes your beer," he warned her, only half-joking. Melanie laughed, maybe a little too shrilly, and then Eli shut the door. It was an agony of waiting for the 10 nearly seconds it took for Eli to go through the gate. As soon as she heard the familiar squeak and clatter of her gate, she sprang away from the hands in her hair, turning around and glaring balefully at Mr. Helmet, who had now reappeared and was laughing and smiling to himself.

"Oh, I bet you think you're so goddamn funny," she hissed sourly, "You are ruining my life!" He smirked at her and gave her a little bow. Melanie scowled at him and then pushed past him, into her bedroom area, yanking on the accordion door harshly, clicking it closed.

Emboldened by his being out of view, she called out angrily, "You know, for someone who detests us poor little wretches so much, you sure do like fucking with us, don't you?" She hurriedly pulled up the sweat pants, yanking them on top of the shorts she was currently wearing, before pushing open the accordion door. He was, of course, standing right there.

His gaze was heavy and impassive and made her stomach tingle slightly as he looked down at her. "I will admit, I have not visited this realm in many ages; things are vastly different from what I can see," he commented in a low, lascivious voice, all elegance and danger wrapped together, "But, if I do remember correctly, yes, I do quite enjoy fucking with your kind." He paused and she turned fuchsia, realizing what she had said, and how he was purposefully twisting it into something dirty.

"At least with the appealing ones," he added, before turning around and moving immediately and languidly back to his spot on the couch, snatching up the book there. Melanie found herself nearly panting and grabbed the bathroom door, yanking it open and throwing herself inside. She gave herself a breather, sitting on the closed-lid toilet for a moment and reaching up to her tap to splash some water on her face and wrists.

Are you attracted to him? She thought to herself in horror and mild disgust. Melanie looked into the mirror, saw the pink on her cheeks and the brightness of her eyes, and realized yes, she really was mildly attracted to her stupid, helmet-loving home-invader.

Her mind immediately went to Eli, good, sturdy, loving and lovable Eli. No, I want Eli, not an alien. The thought came unbidden and made her laugh out loud, and with that she regained herself. Melanie grabbed a hair elastic and pulled the waved and curly mess of her dark hair back and up off her face and neck, securing it in a fat

ponytail. She adjusted the draw string on her sweat pants and buttoned up her cardigan so that nothing below her collarbones were visible.

There, that'll do, she thought to herself, feeling suitably armed. Outside the bathroom, her visitor had not moved from the couch, and Melanie crammed her feet back into her boots, not looking over at him.

"If you're bored, you can watch TV," she offered him, snatching up the converter and carrying it over to him.

"What is this?" He asked, looking at the metal and plastic object in her hand.

"It's the converter, it remotely controls the TV; they're great," she said, pressing the power button. His head moved up quickly when the TV began to suddenly blare at them.

"What is this thing?" He asked her carefully, a trace of curiosity in his voice, "Those people are clearly not trapped in that box, and yet that is clearly what this box intends me to think." She turned and looked down at him and he looked up at her briefly, his eyebrows drawn together.

"It's for, um, entertainment?" She said, completely at a loss as to how to explain what a TV actually was, "It's like moving pictures?" He looked mildly interested and took the converter from her.

"Have you ever been to the theatre?" She asked him, and he nodded, not looking up at her as he poked at the channel changer buttons. Johnny Carson popped up on screen, and she nodded her head at the TV.

"It's like that, theatre shows in this box," she said, hoping that helped. He had already seemed to master use of the converter and was flicking through the four channels she had. She reached down and brushed his thumb out of the way on the channel button, her own pressing down on it. She leaned down a little closer, her attention fully drawn to the converter in his hand.

"It's late, so there won't be the greatest shows on TV right now, if any," she murmured, clicking the channel button twice until Johnny Carson was back on. "This is Johnny Carson, he interviews famous people and has a bit of a variety show, it's a fun show," she explained, frowning a little, "It's a new one too, so you're in luck." Part of her wished she could stay; Johnny kept her entertained many a late night, but Eli and her beer were waiting for her.

Melanie tilted her head, realizing she was leaned fairly close to the stranger's own face, and leaned back. He was examining her carefully, an easy, restful expression on his face. He nodded then, and she stepped back, hurrying past him to the door. Her hand paused on the handle.

"I never asked your name," she said lamely, realizing that had been incredibly stupid of her, "And I'm assuming you already know my name is Mel, Melanie" if you were interested in calling me something other than 'Midgardian' or 'little wretch'." He didn't say anything

and she sighed in exasperation.

"What is your name?" She asked him, a little forcefully since it seemed he wasn't going to volunteer it without a direct request.

"It's Loki," he muttered, clicking on the volume of the converter. Johnny Carson's laugh filled the room, and Melanie pushed the door open and stepped outside, going to her friends.

End
file.